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ABSTRACT

This report examines the activities, funding, and affiliations of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), highlighting its promotion of school vouchers, affiliations of its leaders and board of directors, and history of its funders. The BAEO bills itself as a grassroots coalition of African American leaders, though it is bankrolled by several small foundations known better for supporting school privatization schemes and affirmative action rollbacks than empowering African Americans (the John Walton and the Walton Family Foundation, Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, American Education Reform Council, and Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation). The BAEO board includes primarily African American voucher supporters, many of whom are high-profile advocates, such as Former Rep. Floyd Flake and right-wing radio host Armstrong Williams. The BAEO's recent powerful advertising campaign, which uses the language of the civil rights movement, appears to be part of the Right's campaign to re-cast the image of the voucher movement and build broader support for policies to undermine public education. Two appendices present contributors to the BAEO and recent facts about school vouchers. (SM)

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PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY FOUNDATION

Community Voice or Captive of the Right?

A Closer Look at the Black Alliance for Educational Options

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Over the past nine months, millions of Americans have seen compelling television ads featuring African-American parents talking about the importance of school choice to them and their children. The ads and their sponsoring organization – the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) – seemed to come out of nowhere. In fact, BAEO and its ad campaign are just the latest tactical tools of a handful of wealthy right-wing foundations and individuals that have funded the school voucher movement for decades.

BAEO's ads tout the benefits of voucher programs, featuring earnest testimonials by African-American parents with children in voucher programs in Florida, Ohio and Wisconsin. Well-produced and eye-catching, these television ads are the product of a new group but there is a long right-wing history behind them.

This report provides an overview of the activities, funding and affiliations of BAEO, examining its promotion of school vouchers, the affiliations of its leaders and board of directors, and the history of its funders. People For the American Way has produced other reports analyzing existing voucher programs and documenting their failure to address the needs of low-income children.[‡]

BAEO's Campaigns: Image and Strategy

With the voucher legislation and ballot initiatives of the 1980s failing, voucher proponents embraced a new strategy – adopting the language of the civil rights movement and targeting the African-American community. This political strategy is designed to boost support for vouchers, not only among African-Americans, but also among progressive and moderate suburban whites, many of whom support strong public schools. The current public relations and legislative focus on poor children does not alter right-wing voucher proponents' long-term goal of broader-based voucher systems that would irreparably harm public education.

BAEO announced its formation on August 24, 2000 at a national press conference in Washington, D.C. Former Milwaukee Schools Superintendent Dr. Howard Fuller, the group's president and founder, said it would support tax-funded voucher programs, private scholarships, tuition tax credits, charter schools and public/private partnerships.

Almost immediately after formation, BAEO began running print ads in several national newspapers, including the *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, and *New York Times*, and over a dozen community newspapers with predominantly black readership.[1] The ads feature young African-American students and their parents repeating BAEO's mantra, "Parental school choice is widespread – unless you're poor." Designed to put a new face on what has traditionally been a largely white Republican movement, the ads' objective, Fuller explained, "is to change the face of [the voucher] movement."[2]

[‡] An extensive collection of PFAW's research on vouchers is available at: http://www.pfaw.org/issues/education/vouchers/

The ad campaign expanded after the November 2000 election to include television and radio spots in the Washington, D.C. area in what BAEO organizers described as a targeted attempt to influence key opinion-makers, like lawmakers and journalists. Kaleem Caire, BAEO's executive director, explained the ad campaign strategy in a *Family News in Focus* article, saying, "[Washington, D.C.] has the most opinion leaders in the country – and it's out there where we felt that the message needed to be sent first."[3]

A second blitz of television ads touting the benefits of voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland and Florida ran from April through June 2001. "Anybody who watches TV in Washington, D.C.," Jim Manley, press secretary for Senator Ted Kennedy told *USA Today*, "is going to stumble across these ads."[4] In addition to Washington, D.C. and national newspapers, the campaign targeted 30 newspapers and 35 radio stations in Wisconsin, where the fight over vouchers is a constant part of the political landscape.[5]

The extent of BAEO ad spending has been the source of some speculation. The group announced it was beginning operations with a $900,000 budget in August 2000 and has since reported having spent $1.3 million on last November's ads. However, given BAEO's aggressive advertising in expensive media markets, their ad spending by now is far higher. By some estimates, BAEO's ad buys have been worth as much as $3 million[6] – a handsome feat considering the group is only a year old.

BAEO is also organizing chapters in many cities. In March 2001, BAEO began its organizing efforts with its first annual meeting in Milwaukee – bringing over 600 African-American voucher backers from 35 states together for the express purpose of starting local chapters. By May, chapters were operating in Milwaukee, New York, Denver, Indianapolis and Philadelphia and the group claimed to be organizing chapters in nine other cities. In July, BAEO announced the formation of a new chapter in St. Louis. BAEO currently claims to have chapters in over twenty cities and more than 1,000 members.

BAEO bills itself as a grassroots coalition of African-American leaders. But a closer look reveals that BAEO is bankrolled by a small number of foundations better known for supporting school privatization schemes and affirmative action rollbacks than empowering African-Americans.

The Indianapolis chapter recently hosted a conference with the prominent African-American voucher supporter Rev. Floyd Flake as the keynote speaker.[7] The St. Louis chapter has announced plans to start running ads in the fall.[8] If this level of activity is any indication, BAEO has quick expansion plans – and deep pockets to back them up.

The Money Tree

BAEO bills itself as a coalition of up-and-coming leaders working within the African-American community. But a closer look reveals that BAEO is bankrolled by a small number of right-wing foundations better known for supporting education privatization and affirmative action rollbacks than empowering African-Americans or low-income families.

Four groups that BAEO lists as benefactors are major players in the right-wing voucher movement. In fact, the Walton Foundation and the Bradley Foundation have financed much of the movement.

The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation and the American Education Reform Council are pro-voucher advocacy groups that – while also receiving significant funding from the Walton and Bradley Foundations – are lending their own early financial support to BAEO, the relative newcomer.

Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation

It is not surprising that BAEO is headquartered in Milwaukee. Wisconsin has been the lynchpin of the voucher movement for over a decade and the Milwaukee-based Bradley Foundation has been at the center of the action.

The Milwaukee school voucher program has long received crucial support from the Bradley Foundation. In fact, former Wisconsin School Superintendent John Benson says the program would never have started if it were not for Michael Joyce, president of the Bradley Foundation until July 2001. Joyce was "the firepower behind the voucher initiative," says Benson. "He's the one who fired up and then convinced then Governor [Tommy] Thompson," Benson explains, "Without them, we wouldn't have school vouchers."[9]

The Bradley Foundation played a key role when the Milwaukee voucher program came under legal challenge for violating the separation of church and state after the program expanded to allow tax-funded vouchers to be used in parochial schools. Bradley gave the state of Wisconsin $350,000 to pay for the work that Kenneth Starr, former independent counsel, and his firm Kirkland & Ellis did to defend the voucher program before the Wisconsin State Supreme Court.[10]

Providing not only money but also connections—Fuller describes Joyce as a longtime personal friend[11]—the Bradley Foundation's support brings BAEO into the forefront of the school voucher movement. Bradley has also funded Fuller's pro-voucher think tank at Milwaukee's Marquette University. As of June 2001, the Institute for the Transformation of Learning received more than $1.7 million from Bradley for its various projects.[12]

The Bradley Foundation is considered one of the leading right-wing foundations in the country, granting more than $355 million from 1985 to 1999 to right-wing think tanks, affirmative action rollback projects, and efforts to privatize the education system.

On the Bradley Foundation's grant list:

- The Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute (AEI), two right-wing think tanks with considerable influence in Congress and the current Bush administration, received $11 million and $12 million respectively from Bradley between 1985-98.
- In addition to Heritage and AEI, Bradley funds a number of right-wing think tanks that are working to institute vouchers, tuition tax credits and other proposals that would funnel public money to private schools. This includes the Center for Education Reform, the Heartland Institute, the Claremont Institute and the Free Congress Foundation.
- The Center for the Study of Popular Culture has received almost $4 million in Bradley grants since 1989.[13] David Horowitz, the center's president, most recently caused an uproar on college campuses when he tried to run an ad in campus newspapers entitled "Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea—and Racist Too." Horowitz's ninth reason asked "Where is the gratitude of black America" for the gift of "the highest standard of living of blacks anywhere in the world?"[14]

- Charles Murray, co-author of the highly controversial 1994 book *The Bell Curve*—which suggests that African-Americans are intellectually inferior to whites—received almost $1 million from Bradley while at AEI. Michael Joyce, who formerly headed the Bradley Foundation, was specifically cited in the book's acknowledgments.[15]
- Anti-affirmative action groups are other Bradley favorites. This includes the American Civil Rights Institute, started by Ward Connerly, who led the successful effort to eliminate California's affirmative action programs in 1996, and the Center for Individual Rights, which led a successful legal challenge to affirmative action at the University of Texas Law School.[16]

John Walton and the Walton Family Foundation

BAEO started operations with a $900,000 budget. According to the weekly *Human Events*, this came entirely from the Walton Family Foundation. Through the Walton Family Foundation, Wal-Mart heir John Walton is one of the voucher movement's most prolific donors, providing a steady stream of money for almost every element of the movement, from think tanks to political campaigns.

On the policy and research front, the Walton Foundation funds pro-voucher think tanks like the Goldwater Institute and the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. On the legislative front, John Walton personally contributed $2 million to the failed 2000 Michigan voucher initiative[17] as well as $250,000 to California's Prop 174 in 1993, another unsuccessful voucher initiative.[18] Walton also bankrolled the California effort through his American Education Reform Foundation[19], as well as an unsuccessful 1997 voucher campaign in Minnesota.[20]

The Bradley Foundation, a key BAEO contributor, gave nearly $1 million to writer Charles Murray, who co-wrote the 1994 book *The Bell Curve*. The controversial book suggests that Blacks are intellectually inferior to whites.

When voucher programs in Wisconsin and Ohio came under legal fire, right-wing legal groups like the Landmark Legal Foundation and Institute for Justice (IJ), with financial support from both the Walton and Bradley Foundations, defended them in court.[21] IJ's co-founder, Clint Bolick, who previously worked for Landmark, has strong ties to the anti-affirmative action movement and authored the book *The Affirmative Action Fraud: Can We Restore the American Civil Rights Vision?*[22]

The Walton Foundation granted more than $14 million in 2000 to private "scholarship" funds.[23] These private voucher programs are often started and funded by the same people who are lobbying for publicly funded vouchers. They believe that privately funded voucher programs will help create political momentum toward publicly funded vouchers.

American Education Reform Council (AERC)

AERC, a tax-exempt 501(c)(3), is affiliated with the American Education Reform Foundation (AERF), which serves as AERC's lobbying arm. The two groups share office space and Susan Mitchell heads both groups.

John Walton not only funds AERC – giving almost one million dollars via the Walton Foundation between 1999 and 2000[24] – but was also AERF's previous president and provided its initial grant.[25] The Bradley Foundation also supports AERC, providing $300,000 grants in 1998 and 2000.[26] It is

clear that the Bradley and Walton Foundations have a key role in both directly and indirectly funding BAEO. In addition, Howard Fuller himself sits on the AERC board alongside John Walton.[27]

As a 501(c)(3), AERC's political advocacy is restricted. It cannot endorse political candidates and may only do a minimal amount of lobbying on legislation. However, AERC ran "informational" advertisements during the Colorado and Michigan voucher campaigns in 1998 and 2000, respectively. AERC spent $500,000 on the Michigan initiative, in addition to the $2 million Walton spent out of his own pocket.

AERC activities apparently extend beyond advertising to organizing local grassroots organizations. A Friedman Foundation newsletter credits AERC and the Institute for Justice for working together to start Pensacola Parents For School Choice in May 2000.[28]

Without the restrictions of a 501(c)(3), AERF can participate in more overtly political activities.[‡] It was a major force behind failed efforts to get a voucher referendum on the California ballot in 1996 and 1998.[29] Walton and AERF then teamed up with a combined $410,000 in an unsuccessful attempt to pass Proposition 226, so-called "paycheck protection," in California to limit the use of union money being spent in political campaigns.[30] The organizers of the anti-union measure all worked together on the state's failed 1993 voucher initiative and saw the measure as payback for money the teacher's union spent to "cream the measure."[31]

AERF drew public criticism in 1997 when it hired Sterling Tucker, a community activist and former D.C. City Councilman, to organize support for a DC voucher program designed by House Majority Leader Richard Armey (R-Tex.). Local officials opposed this congressional effort to impose a voucher program in the District of Columbia. Several black ministers, who had initially supported the program, later withdrew their support, accusing Tucker of misleading them about the program and not disclosing his connection with AERF.[32]

Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, Inc.

Economist Milton Friedman and his wife Rose founded the Friedman Foundation in 1996 "as the first national foundation devoted exclusively to promoting parental choice."[33] In 2000, the Friedman Foundation gave $30,000 to a symposium at Milwaukee's Marquette University that was hosted by

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[‡] AERF's more political activities have, at times, been controversial. The group became embroiled in an investigation surrounding the 1997 re-election campaign of Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Jon Wilcox, an important race given the court's role in deciding legal challenges to the voucher program. Wilcox opponent Walt Kelly accused Wilcox campaign manager Mark Block and get-out-the-vote organizer Brent Pickens of illegally coordinating campaign activities. The state election board launched an investigation that eventually included AERF. J. Patrick Rooney and Kevin Teasley – then AERF chairman and president – had met with Block after being notified of the importance of the Wilcox election to the Milwaukee voucher program by Bradley Foundation staffers. Although AERF was not found in violation of election law and reportedly denied repeated requests for contributions by Block, Teasley wrote to AERF board members and other voucher supporters, informing them of the importance of Wilcox's election. Following Teasley's letter, AERF board member Robert Thompson contributed $10,000 to Wilcox's campaign, the maximum allowed under law. Rooney and Teasley have extensive right-wing credentials. Teasley, former president of AERF, has worked for the Heritage Foundation, the libertarian Reason Foundation, and served in the Reagan White House Office of Public Liaison. Rooney has subsidized private vouchers in his home state of Indiana and told the right-wing Heartland Institute's *School Reform News*: "We are not going to fix the present system, so quit kidding ourselves." In the same interview, he recommended that readers "invade the schools."

BAEO founder Howard Fuller and the Marquette-based Institute for the Transformation of Learning.[34] Such meetings provided Fuller's base for launching BAEO. The Friedman Foundation also spent $230,000 to produce five television and four radio commercials for BAEO in 2000.[35]

The Friedman Foundation promotes vouchers on a number of fronts. The group provides financial grants to groups like BAEO, but it also does a great deal of pro-voucher work directly out of its Indiana headquarters.[36] For instance, the Foundation spent over $3 million from 1999-2000 on its own ad campaigns promoting vouchers in California, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, and Washington D.C.[37]

Economist Milton Friedman, whose foundation helps to fund BAEO's activities, wrote in 1995 that "the privatization of schooling would produce a new, highly active and profitable private industry."

Milton Friedman, who won a Nobel Prize for his work on monetary theory, is credited with laying the original academic framework for voucher theory in the 1950's. Friedman's academic work focuses more on the financial profits school privatization could reap rather than the purported assistance it could offer low-income students in failing schools—the interest BAEO purports to represent. In a 1995 essay entitled "Public Schools: Make Them Private," Friedman wrote, "the privatization of schooling would produce a new, highly active and profitable private industry."[38] Friedman insists that voucher programs ought to include everyone, even wealthy families. "Programs that are designed for the poor will be poor programs," he told the editor of the pro-voucher *School Reform News*.[39]

The Friedman Foundation had assets totaling $5.3 million in 1999, and also received $100,000 from the Walton Foundation in 1999 and 2000.[40] J. Patrick Rooney, the wealthy voucher backer and former AERF chair, also sits on the Friedman Foundation Board. Rooney is also associated with the pro-voucher Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation, with which three BAEO board members are affiliated.

BAEO Staff and Board Members

The BAEO board is comprised entirely of African-American voucher supporters. It includes founder and president Howard Fuller and executive director Kaleem Caire, along with a range of pro-voucher activists from the national, state and local levels. With members representing 13 different states and the District of Columbia, the BAEO board of directors includes many high-profile advocates, such as Former Rep. Floyd Flake (D-N.Y.) and right-wing radio host Armstrong Williams. Some, like J. Kenneth Blackwell and Dwight Evans, are elected state officials. Others have made a career in working in charter or voucher schools or in private management companies that stand to gain from privatization of public schools.

Dr. Howard L. Fuller, President and Founder

With the help of generous contributors such as the Bradley and Walton Foundations, former Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Howard Fuller founded BAEO to increase African-American support for the school voucher movement. BAEO grew out of conferences on school vouchers and African-Americans that Fuller hosted at Marquette University, where he runs the Institute for the Transformation of Learning (ITL).

Born and raised in Milwaukee, Fuller served as dean of general education at the Milwaukee Area Technical College for two years and then headed up the Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services from 1988 to 1991. Fuller began to make a name for himself nationally by first devising an unsuccessful plan to create a separate black school district in 1987, and later becoming a prominent supporter of school vouchers in Milwaukee.

Fuller's 1991 appointment as superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) was a surprise to many in the community more accustomed to Fuller being "one of the school system's most vocal critics," as *Education Week* put it.[41] The state legislature passed a special law exempting Fuller from the requirement that he have three years of pre-collegiate teaching experience before he could be confirmed to the post.[42]

In addition to supporting the Milwaukee voucher program, Fuller indicated his support for privatization efforts in other ways during his four-year stint as superintendent. He promoted state legislation to broaden Wisconsin's charter laws to allow private firms to run public schools without the use of district employees. Later, Fuller considered contracts from two for-profit school management firms, the Edison Project and Education Alternatives Inc. – the latter a company owned and operated by BAEO funder John Walton – to run school-to-work programs. No deal, however, was ever finalized. Fuller also invited RAND Institute researcher and privatization advocate Paul T. Hill to speak to MPS administrators. Hill's 1995 RAND report, "Reinventing Public Education," details how to replace "the entire existing public education governance system" with a contracting system.[43]

Fuller resigned as superintendent in 1995 following school board elections in which four of five candidates backed by the teachers' union were elected. He said he did not want to face "death by a thousand cuts"[44] from a school board critical of his agenda. After his resignation, Fuller founded the Institute for the Transformation of Learning (ITL) at Marquette University with significant financial help from the Bradley Foundation. ITL provides assistance to charter schools, runs Technology Resource Centers in Milwaukee and researches school voucher programs.

In 1998, Fuller became involved in city education policy again, this time as chair of the charter school review committee.[45] Some local elected officials expressed concern over potential conflicts of interest because Fuller's wife, Deborah McGriff, works for the Edison Project, which operates charter schools in several cities. Fuller said that he would act appropriately if a conflict arose.[46]

In 1999, then-Gov. George W. Bush asked Fuller to join his education policy advisory team, a group that included fellows from right-wing thinks tanks like the Hoover Institution and the Hudson Institute.[47]

Kaleem Caire, Executive Director

Since becoming executive director of BAEO in November 2000, Kaleem Caire has joined Fuller as a media spokesperson for vouchers. Caire served as director of the Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth. He later became an "education consultant" to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Caire ran for Madison School Board in 1998, and though he received 46 percent of the vote, he failed to oust the more conservative incumbent Ray Allen.[48]

Other BAEO Board Members

Right-wing media figure **Armstrong Williams** is perhaps the best-known BAEO board member. A former aide to Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) and protégé of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, Williams is a vocal spokesperson for other right-wing positions, including opposing affirmative action and gay rights.[49]

Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell is a prominent Republican who previously served as undersecretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development during the first Bush Administration. Blackwell, a contributor to Alan Keyes' Black America's PAC, currently serves on the board of the Ohio School Choice Committee and the advisory board for Children First CEO America, a pro-voucher group founded by BAEO contributor John Walton.

Former Rep. Floyd Flake (D-N.Y.), president of Edison Charter Schools, is one of several BAEO board members who run companies that either service charter schools or would otherwise stand to gain financially from further privatization of the public education system. Edison operates for-profit charter schools in 21 states plus the District of Columbia.[50] According to the *National Journal*, Flake was the only member of the Congressional Black Caucus to support vouchers and he has continued to push for African-American support of voucher programs since retiring.

Deborah McGriff also works for Edison as president of Edison Teacher's College. McGriff is married to Howard Fuller and is a former superintendent herself. As of November 1999, McGriff reportedly had $3 million in Edison stock options.[51]

William Breazell serves on the boards of two other pro-voucher organizations, Colorado Springs for School Choice (CSSC) and Children Having Opportunities in Colorado Education (CHOICE). Breazell claimed the national NAACP pressured him to resign as head of the Colorado Springs NAACP over his support for vouchers.

Dale Sadler, another Colorado-based BAEO board member, sits on the CHOICE board with Breazell.

Jacqueline Cissell is community relations director for the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation (GEOF), which is affiliated with both CHOICE and CSSC. The Friedman and Bradley Foundations fund both BAEO and GEOF.

Pennsylvania State Representative Dwight Evans, a Democrat, introduced voucher and tuition tax credit legislation repeatedly since joining the legislature in 1980. Evans' 1997 voucher proposal would have provided $5,500 to students in failing schools.

Amber Blackwell headed the New Village charter school in Oakland, California. The elementary school's ambitious goal was to teach about tolerance by exploring issues of race, class and sexual orientation in the curriculum. However, with 100 percent teacher turnover and financial troubles, New Village's charter was revoked as of the end of the 1999-2000 school year, making it one of only six schools in California to be "de-chartered" since the state began its charter school program in 1993.[52] "Charter schools can't be a mom-and-pop thing, and that's what we were – a group of people with great intentions and little understanding of how to run a big system," Blackwell explained.[53]

Taunya Young was an administrator at a controversial school that was actually expelled from the Cleveland voucher program in January 2001. The Golden Christian Academy conducted all classroom instruction through videos targeted towards Christian home-schoolers.

Conclusion

The beautifully produced and lavishly funded advertising campaign by BAEO is the most recent tactic to emerge from the Right's strategic campaign to re-cast the image of the voucher movement and build broader political support for policies that would undermine the public education system. For years, the Right has tried to cultivate a small, but visible, base of African-American support for its agenda on such issues as vouchers and gay rights.

Right-wing groups have also put a great deal of effort into cultivating African-American spokespeople, and working to counter the legacy of mistrust that communities of color have for a movement that has historically ranged from indifference to opposition toward racial justice efforts. Yet, at the same time, the right-wing political movement has continued to attack traditional civil rights leaders and initiatives.

BAEO is the latest step in the Right's long effort to portray school vouchers as the new civil rights fight. The group does bring together many African-American voucher supporters and only a fraction of them are involved in right-wing politics in general. But BAEO takes its place among the other think tanks and local organizations that have been created with money from right-wing foundations as well as individuals and organizations hoping to profit from promoting increased privatization of public education.

BAEO promotes itself as a parent-led grassroots organization devoted to increasing educational opportunity for poor children. In fact, as this report shows, BAEO was organized by and is funded by the same small collection of wealthy right-wing individuals and foundations that have been for years primary backers of pro-voucher, anti-public education efforts.

Appendix A

Past and Current Contributors to the Black Alliance for Education Options

The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation
The Walton Family Foundation
VCJ Foundation
Helen Bader Foundation, Inc.
Milton & Rose Friedman Foundation
Fleck Foundation
Baur Foundation
Q3 Company
American Education Reform Council
Individual Donors
Anonymous

*Up until August 21, 2001, BAEO listed its contributors on its web site. After launching a re-vamped Web site on August 23, contributors were apparently no longer disclosed.

Appendix B

Recent Facts about School Vouchers

Lack of Public Support

In 2000, voters in Michigan and California overwhelmingly defeated voucher proposals by margins of more than 2 to 1. In Michigan, 69 percent of all voters and 77 percent of African-American voters rejected the proposal. In California, 71 percent of all voters, 68 percent of African-American voters and 77 percent of Latino voters rejected the voucher initiative. Vouchers have been defeated every other time they have been subjected to a statewide referendum, never receiving more than 36 percent of voter support. California voters also rejected vouchers in 1993. Other voucher proposals were defeated in Washington state in 1996, Colorado in 1992, and Oregon in 1990.

The Cost of Vouchers

Conservative estimates placed the cost of a national voucher program at $73 billion – 25 percent more than the annual national public education budget.[54] Former U.S Education Secretary Richard Riley estimated that a voucher program open to all students would cost taxpayers more than $15 billion for the 5 million students already enrolled in private schools before then first public school student entered a voucher school.[55]

Wisconsin taxpayers pay an average of 40 percent more per child to send students to Milwaukee voucher schools than a parent pays to send their child to the *very same* private schools.[56] And voucher money *does* come at the expense of the public schools. The Cleveland voucher program is funded through the city's portion of the state's Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid (DPIA),[57] thereby decreasing funds available for Cleveland programs for disadvantaged public school students.[58] In its second year, the Cleveland program exceeded its budget by 41 percent and the shortfall was covered with funds earmarked for public schools.[59] At the same time, several public schools had to borrow against future revenues to keep their doors open.[60]

The Effectiveness of Vouchers

There has been no conclusive research documenting the effectiveness of voucher programs. The General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of the U.S. Congress, surveyed existing voucher research and reported that "contract researcher teams for Cleveland and Milwaukee found little or no statistically significant differences in voucher students' achievement test scores compared to public school students...."[61]

People For the American Way Foundation has also analyzed research funded by voucher advocates claiming to show that voucher programs are effective. For information on how this research has distorted the facts about vouchers, see: http://www.pfaw.org/issues/education/vouchers/

Endnotes

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[12] Mediatransparency data reports Bradley funding of ITL is $648,465. When combined with University documents that show Howard Fuller raised $1,067,000 from Bradley between January 2000 and June 2001, the $1.7 million figure can be calculated. Marquette University grant information is available online via http://www.mu.edu/newsfromyou/messages/13/13.html?995640770 and was accessed on July 31, 2001.
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